

AN INTERPRETATION OF SAID AHMED MOHAMED'S NOVEL *KIZA KATIKA NURU* AND SOME ASPECTS OF TRANSLATION¹

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1. Introduction

This article presents an interpretation of Said Ahmed Mohamed's fourth novel *Kiza katika Nuru* (1988). My aim is to show that this novel is an engaging model of modern Swahili fiction, in which the author provides a very acute perception of the contemporary social and political realities in Tanzania. The article focuses on the plot and characters, and will touch some aspects of language usage and problems of translation. The latter aspect is derived from my work experience in translating *Kiza katika Nuru* into Italian: *Il buio nella luce* (Nocera 2004).

2. Thematical Features

The title '*Kiza katika Nuru*' ('Darkness within Light') is the leitmotiv of the novel, as well as the status quo of contemporary Tanzania. Even though the novel was written in the 1980s, it is still relevant today.

'Kiza' and 'Nuru' are the two most significant terms of the novel and recur with a certain frequency: 'nuru' recurs twenty times, not considering its synonyms – *mwanga, anga, mwan-gaza, uchengu* – and 'kiza' seventy-three times, demonstrating that darkness predominates over light.

Darkness is dense, extensive and total – it penetrates everywhere. It has been dominant and impending for a long time. This blanket of darkness covers the people from head to foot preventing them from seeing, thus stunning them. People's ignorance, as well as poverty and misfortune evidently are one of the reasons that provoke such a condition. Moreover, darkness is a screen for deception, lowered by the few who have the power to subdue many to whom they give the illusion of freedom. Darkness also stands for the huge black wall that divides Bwan Juba and Mvita – a father and his son, who are in discord because of their ideological differences.

For the moment, in the darkness, only slender gleams appear in the hope that one day the light can rule: there will come a day when light – that represents joy, luck and love – will shine in. Mvita, the character to whom the author entrusts all his optimism is convinced:

¹ This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 18th Swahili Kolloquium, Bayreuth, 6-8 May 2005. This paper has been commented on by Elena Bertocini-Zúbková, Lutz Diegner, and Angelo Zavarella.

“Kiza kitaondoka [...] Kiza cha usiku kumezwa na mwezi na cha mchana na jua . . .” (KKN: 244f.)²

“Darkness will go away [...] Nighttime darkness shall be devoured by the moon, and that of daytime by the sun . . .”³

“Il buio andrà via [...] Il buio della notte sarà inghiottito dalla luna e quello del giorno dal sole . . .” (*Il buio nella luce*: 170)⁴

With the juxtaposition of two opposite terms the title is emblematic of a continuous presentation of life in its two opposite aspects: a positive one and a negative one, that is: war - peace, love - hate, demon - angel, rich - poor, luck - bad luck, educated - ignorant, justice - injustice, pomp - poverty, villa - hut, hope - despair, weakness - strength, country - town, life - death.

Therefore the title refers to the total sense of the text and summarizes it.

2.1. The Plot

Set in Zanzibar⁵ in the mid 1970s until the early 1980s⁶, the source of inspiration for the novel is the conflict between a rich and powerful father, Bwan Juba, and the children from his first marriage, Mvita and Mbishi. Mvita prefers to resign from his father’s business and to live poorly, undertaking the struggles of the union, rather than betray his conscience (cf. Bertoncini-Zúbková 2001: 98). Because of the ideological differences between Bwan Juba and Mvita, the latter and his fiancée – Salma, lose their jobs. After losing his work and having been turned out of his home, Mvita makes a living by doing odd jobs. This gives him the chance to join the working class and the peasants, whom he starts enlightening so as to remove the darkness of ignorance. This behaviour of his ensures that, inevitably, he will become Bwan Juba’s biggest enemy who, through the ignorance of the people, finds ways to get rich at their expense. Mvita’s meetings and conversations threaten his father’s public image, social position and influence (cf. Mbatiah 1996: 17). Afterwards when he becomes too dangerous for his father’s political career, he is killed by the latter, who throws suspicion onto his

² All citations from the novel will be given as e.g. ‘KKN: 23’ (*Kiza katika Nuru*:). There is a frequent usage of ‘. . .’ [sic] in the original text.

³ All the English translations of my quotations are by Angelo Zavarella.

⁴ All the Italian translations of my quotations are mine; consequently the page numbers will be given from my M.A. Thesis that includes *Il buio nella luce* – the Italian translation of *Kiza katika Nuru* (cf. Nocera 2004).

⁵ Even if not specified from a few details one may infer that the environment is certainly the society of Zanzibar; actually, in the text the author mentions a certain quarter of Zanzibar, *Ng’ambu* (KKN: 207). *Ng’ambu* or *ng’ambo* is the term for the “new” parts of Zanzibar town, i.e. every part of town that is not *Mji mkongwe* (Stone Town). Besides, the author explains in the glossary (*sherehe*) of the novel (KKN: 264-267) some of the children’s language found in KKN 29 (“andaranduzwa, anjugurubis”) as explicitly Zanzibari: *ni maneno ya mzaha waliyokuwa wakiyatumia watoto wa Kiunguja zamani pale walipofaulu au walipopatia kufanya jambo (simo)* (joking words used in former times by Zanzibari children when they succeeded in or managed to do something (jargon); KKN 266f).

⁶ With regard to the time of the story, one must wait for the last chapter (KKN: 257) to encounter the unique and very important temporal reference: “*siku ya Jumamosi (2-4-83), yapata saa tano ya usiku*”: the day, the month, the year and time Bwana Juba is killed. This precise time indication is an exception, as the novel otherwise talks indefinitely about years and years that pass. There are really a lot of years that separate the beginning of the story from the end, narrated with a certain captivating speed: from the first chapter (when Mvita argues with the father and is dismissed) to chapter eleven (cf. KKN: 205) seven years pass. Therefore, one can imagine that the novel is realized in a space of about seven years time, thus the actual temporal setting of the plot would be 1976-1983.

daughter-in-law, Salma. Soon afterwards, Bwan Juba will be killed by his first wife, Kudura, and their other son, Mbishi (cf. Bertoncini-Zúbková 2001: 98).

It is a very intricate plot, even if the story is simple and can be re-summarized, as I have done, in using few lines. But, this summary does not render the complexity of the text: in it, many narrative elements, along with the presence of minor characters, stories and various environments, complete and specify the story.

Moreover, in the context of the novel, the reader gets into personal considerations with which the narrator intervenes by commenting upon attitudes, facts and thoughts of the characters, with which he gives authority to the telling voice which appears superior to the events it is telling. This, however, is not as irritating as Mwenda Mbatiah writes

The artistic worth of Mohamed's works is compromised by their unmistakable formal and stylistic flaws. Although I have pointed out the damaging tendency of authorial intrusiveness in just one of the novels, this is indeed a problem that is prevalent, in varying degrees, in all the works. Both in narration and in characterisation, Mohamed lacks the authorial restraint and stylistic elegance that marks works of such doyens of the Swahili novel as Mohamed Suleiman Mohamed and Euphrase Kezilahabi. This factor aggravates the explicit tendentiousness of his novels, thus making it more irritating. Since the committed writer has to take a stand – either implicitly or explicitly, on the politic-economic reality of society, which is by its very nature conflictual, he faces the risk of degenerating from the artist to the ideologue. (Mbatiah 1996: 18)

Kimani Njogu replies:

The critic [Mwenda Mbatiah] complains about the presence of the authorial voice in Mohamed's novels. What is not appreciated in the article is that the presence of the authorial voice or point of view is part of the compositional-stylistic unity of the novel genre. The authorial voice emerges in moral, philosophical, scientific, oratorical, and ethnographic statements. The author's voice is part of the intertextual opulence of a work of art, especially the novel. Said Ahmed's strategy of masking the author's words is through an intensification of plot, character, and theme. In my reading of his works, I do not find any excessive "intrusiveness" that is "irritating" because the various voices are sufficiently regulated. (Njogu 1997: 84)

The response of Said Ahmed Mohamed himself is:

Mbatiah refers to "the damaging tendency of authorial intrusiveness in one of the novels (which one he does not tell us), a problem that is prevalent, in varying degree, in all the works". This is a serious allegation and as such needs at least one case of substantiation. What is appalling about this statement is not the fact that Mbatiah says it or that does not like my narrative style in the novel, but the fact that he makes the whole idea sound as if what he calls "intrusiveness" is not a feature at all in the structure of the novel. Mbatiah's "intrusiveness" is termed "digression" or "commentary" by experts. (Mohamed 1997: 90) –

In relation to that he explains:

"One good thing about digression is that it breaks the monotony by providing a variation in the narrative thrust. And by its inherent power of generalisation it acts as an immediate emphasis and summary of certain ideas, topics or subtopics and does so by drawing us closer to its naked truth. Essentially a digression must

evolve from one of the components of the structure of the novel: theme, story, plot, characterisation etc. It is possible that Mbatiah is not aware of this fact and therefore resorts to empty accusations that “this factor aggravates the explicit tentatiousness of (my) novels, thus making it more irritating?” Readers’ irritation is a subjective thing. I doubt whether it can be shown in an essay like Mbatiah’s, since it lies in the reader’s discretion and judgment.” (Mohamed 1997: 92)

The author’s usage of these digressions is very effective in clarifying ideas and themes while creating a certain suspense. These devices range from simple digression to the broad “story within the story”. They are mostly edifying stories.⁷

The author’s voice is not the only one to introduce a digression and inform about the antecedents or the precedents of a character; there are also those of the characters.

2.2. The Characters

Said Ahmed Mohamed offers the reader a wide variety of characters: the main characters are Bwan Juba and Mvita who are surrounded by other well-characterized figures such as Kudura, Mbishi, Bi Khaltiyy, Kitwana and Biti Jabu. The characters are alive, with feelings and contradictions. Their physical descriptions not only reveal their appearances, but also their gestures and actions. By the end of the novel one has the sensation of knowing their habitual gestures and all the reasons that drive them in life. Regarding the minor characters, some of their portrayals are more or less definite, but always incisive.

Another exposing technique of the author is to describe a character through the eyes of another. Consider, for instance, the portrait which Mbishi draws of his father Bwan Juba onto the wall: it is a masterpiece, but more so is the description of the author who conveys it in such a way that the reader can truly visualize the imaginary painting:

Kichwa kikubwa chenye paji pana kimepigwa lembe. Chini, katikati ya paji, sijida pevu limeota na kuchipukia tabaka tatu za ngozi, ishara ya uchamungu na ukosefu wa hisia. Mashavu, mabofu yaliyopulizwa. Pua, pande lililotomewa ovyo, limetapanyika na kushikana na mashavu. Macho makubwa yana mng’aro wa kishehe unaoweza kumtuliza mhoji asithubutu kufumbua mdomo. Chini ya kila jicho, viwambo vinaning’inia kama vijumba vya ndege kuyalemaza macho yake kutazama chini kutaka yasitake, na kuifanya sura yake, baadhi ya wakati, ionekane kama mwenye heshima au anayeona haya. Jambo lililomzidishia heba na faida. Miwani ilisimama wima juu ya manzi wa pua. Masikio majumba ya uvi yaliyohamwa, yanamning’inia na kuning’iniza ndewe juu ya shingo yake ya kinu, fupi, iliyotopea kuifanya ikabwe na kifungo cha kanzu kilichochopea mapetoni mwa nyama. Mabega yamekwea na kisha yameanguka kuuelemea mpandikizi wa kifua usio kadiri wala kiasi!

Tumboni pana mvimbo tepweretepwere uliofanya magongo ya mikono yatenguke mbali kidogo na kitovu chake. Matumbo yenyewe mawili ya maana, na la tatu linachungulia na kupiga hodi – kijitumbo tuseme kinachojitahidi kuyafukuzia mengine, ambayo lile kubwa limeshobokea nje na la pili, dogo kidogo, linachungulia huku limetumbukia. Uzito wa mtu huyu wote huo, unabebwa na vijiguu vidogo, vyembamba, vitege, vilivyomfanya aonekane betebete na mwenye matege. Juu

⁷ See for instance Shazia’s tale about the episode at the airport in chapter 13.

kavaa juba linaloburutika kumkamilishia heba yake ya ushehe. Hivi ndivyo mtu aliyemuumba Mbishi alivyokuwa. (KKN: 28)

An enormous head with a large brow, wrapped in a turban. Below, around mid-face, calluses sprouted outwards, a result of exhaustion, together with three wrinkles of skin, a sign of veneration towards God and the lack of feelings. His cheeks, huge swollen blisters. His nose, a large one, put there by chance, displayed and planted onto the cheeks. Huge eyes of considerable glossiness, capable of calming an interviewer so that he wouldn't even risk to open his mouth. Under each eye, large swells hung like bird nests, defacing the eyes and constraining them to look below, wilful, and in each moment giving him the appearance of a respectable and reserved person thus making him seem even more handsome and interesting than he was. His spectacles straight on his nostrils. His ears, similar to huge wasp nests conveyed there, hung and made his earlobes swing onto his neck, similar to a mortar, short, squashed and suffocated by the binds of his *kanzu*⁸ that cut into the rolls of fat. His broad shoulders had given way, collapsing into his large and above normal chest.

Towards the mid height of his stomach, a flabby bulge kept his arms a bit pushed away from his navel. Two, revealing bellies and a third, that pushed and peeked over and asked to enter – let's say, a small belly, revealing, struggling to follow the others, in which a bigger one leaned outwards and a second one, a little bit smaller, peeked over, collapsing inwards. All the heaviness of this man was leaned onto his legs, somewhat small, thin and crooked, that gave him the aspect of being a bow-legged dwarf. He wore an adhering juba that improved his nice figure. This was man, as Mbishi had created.

Un'enorme testa con la fronte ampia era stata avvolta nel turbante. Sotto, in mezzo alla fronte, spuntava la callosità prodotta dalle prostrazioni assieme a tre grinze della pelle, segno della venerazione a Dio e della mancanza di sentimenti. Le guance, grosse vesciche gonfie. Il naso, un grosso pezzo messo lì a caso, steso e radicato alle guance. Gli occhioni dalla lucentezza considerevole, capaci di far stare tranquillo un intervistatore, affinché non rischi ad aprir bocca. Sotto ogni occhio, grossi rigonfiamenti dondolavano come nidi di uccello, sfigurando gli occhi costretti a guardare in basso, volenti nolenti, e in alcuni momenti lo facevano sembrare una persona rispettosa o riservata. Ciò lo rendeva ancora più bello ed interessante. Gli occhiali dritti sulle narici. Le orecchie: grandi vespai qui trasferiti, dondolavano e facevano dondolare i lobi sul collo simile ad un mortaio, corto, schiacciato da venire soffocato dalla legatura del kanzu che tagliava i rotoli di ciccia. Le spalle alte avevano ceduto, per sottomettersi al petto, grosso ol-tremisura!

All'altezza dello stomaco, un rigonfiamento molliccio teneva le braccia un po' scostate dall'ombelico. Due ventri rilevanti ed un terzo che sbirciava e chiedeva di entrare - un piccolo ventre, diciamo, che si sforzava di inseguire gli altri, di cui quello più grande si sporgeva fuori e il secondo, di poco più piccolo, sbirciava mentre sprofondava dentro. Tutta la pesantezza di quest'uomo era trasportata da gambette davvero piccole, fini, storte, che lo facevano sembrare un nano con le gambe storte. Indossava una juba aderente sì da perfezionare il suo bel fisico. Ecco com'era l'uomo che Mbishi aveva creato. (Il buio nella luce: 19f.)

⁸ *Kanzu*: a long garment with long sleeves worn by men in East Africa; dress (for women).

Furthermore, the author describes the psychological aspects of his characters, giving them a deep symbolic meaning. Therefore, the choice of names for many of the characters – like that of some places⁹ – is deliberate:

'Mvita': *M+vita*; 'the one who makes war'; 'the one who fights'; 'a fighter'.

(Bwan) *'Juba'*: *-juba* means courageous, intrepid, but also arrogant. According to Wamitila (1999: 37), Bwan Juba is 'Mr./Sir Arrogant'. In addition, *'juba'* as a noun is a kind of coat, open in front, with a collar and wide sleeves made of calico cloth and linen. It is the typical robe Bwan Juba is used to wear.

'Mbishi': *M+ubishi*; 'the one who quarrels'; 'a quarreller'.

'Kudura': 'the power of God'; and also 'fate'.

'Kitwana': diminutive of *mtwana*; thus 'young slave', but also 'rascal, scoundrel'.

(Bwana) *'Mkejeli'*: *M+kejeli*; 'a mocker'.

(Biti) *'Jabu'*: anagram of *(Bwana)* *'Juba'*.

The author often refers or alludes to the etymological meaning of names, such as is the case with Mbishi, when he enters the scene for the first time - it is almost as if the author justifies his choice in using this name for this character:

Mbishi alizaliwa mbishi, akakua mbishi. (KKN: 27)

Mbishi was born a quarreller and grew up as a quarreller.

Mbishi nacque contestatore e crebbe contestatore. (*Il buio nella luce*: 19)

They are the so-called 'speaking names', which themselves represent the particular character of the individuals to which they refer to.

According to Kyallo Wadi Wamitila, the use of names in Kiswahili literature is crucial. An understanding of the meanings of the characters' names conveys the theme better, as it adds characterisation. Names play a big role in the general framework of the whole story. The names of characters are not mere tags that distinguish one fictional character from another, but they can also be used as expressions of experiences, ethos, teleology, values, ideology, culture and attitudes of varying shades (cf. Wamitila 1999). Therefore, names provide a further reading and interpretative key of the characters which appear within the text itself.

In regard to the social extraction of the characters this is made clear by the language they use and, above all, by the goods they own and the places they frequent. The repugnance of Bwan Juba is emblematic, when he travels in his Mercedes¹⁰, dressed like an important person

⁹ *'Raha'* means serenity, happiness, but also comfort, ease, pleasure, wealth. It is a residential quarter where the high-ranking ones such as Bwan Juba and Bi Khaltiyy live. *'Hohehahe'* means poor man/men. It is the name of a bar frequented by the poor among which Mvita and Salma are part of. *'Jobless'*: it is the English term for 'unemployed', 'workless'. It is the name of another tavern. People who sit inside are "*vijana wazururaji au mabaha- haria-nchi-kavu kama wanavyoitwa*" (young vagabonds, or rather earth sailors as they are called; KKN: 138f.).

¹⁰ The Mercedes is a status symbol, as also *makuka* (cookers), *tepu* (tape recorders), *redioskaseti* (cassette players), *pleya* (player), *mafeni* (fans), *mafriji* (fridges), *air-condition* (air-conditioner). Cf. KKN: 73.

with *juba*¹¹, turban and foulard, around the non-elegant suburbs where poor people such as Kudura live who are always dressed in a bad outfit with a worn *kanga*:

Sasa gari imeacha mji, ikaelekea kwenye vitongoji. Huku njia mdutoduto kwa mashimo ya mawe. Bwan Juba inamkera mno njia hii kwani inaumiza gari. Mai-sha apitapo kwenye njia hii hunung'unika. Hata leo pia alinung'unika.

"Hali hii ndio inayonipa nisitake kuja sana mitaa hii... lakini utafanyaje unapozaa na mwanamke mkongwe, mjinga na mchafu asiyeweza kuishi mtaa wa fahari kama Raha, katika jumba kubwa kama nililomjengea Bi Khaltiyy . . ." (KKN: 113)

Now the car [Bwan Juba's car] had left the city in direction of the suburbs. There, the roads were noisy due to the holes in them. The roads bothered Bwan Juba because of the damages they brought to his car. As always, when he travelled down these roads he lamented. Even today, he moaned about it.

"These state of things are what make me not want to come often into these neighbour-hood... but what is one to do when he has had children with an old woman, stupid and dirty, one that could not live in a quarter as pompous as Raha, in a big palace like the one I built for Bi Khaltiyy . . ."

Ora l'auto aveva lasciato la città diretta alla periferia. Lì la strada era rumorosa per le buche. Questa strada infastidiva troppo Bwan Juba perché rovinava l'auto. Da sempre, quando passava per questa strada, si lagnava. Anche oggi si lagnò.

"Questo stato di cose è proprio ciò che mi porta a non volere venire spesso in questi quartieri... ma come potresti fare quando hai figli con una donna vecchia, stupida e sporca che non può vivere in un quartiere sfarzoso come Raha, in un grande palazzo come quello che ho costruito per Bi Khaltiyy . . ." (Il buio nella luce: 81)

2.3. The Main Characters in Detail

Bwan Juba, a high government official, is an overbearing man, rich, corrupted, cynical¹² and a venal man – greedy for money and power. He is fat with three bellies, short, squat and sweaty, and through his physical appearance he exhibits his opulence.

Like Makuudi, the protagonist of Said Ahmed Mohamed's second novel *Utengano*, Bwan Juba has betrayed the ideals that first had led the people of Zanzibar in their struggle for independence which, once achieved, turned against the acquired political and social system (cf. Aiello 1999: 60). He exercises the same despotic power that was characteristic for the colonial as well as Omanite rule, because he has not yet realized the idea of a new model of society which ought to be based on the respect among individuals. Egocentrically and materialistically his speeches sometimes revert to traditional values as at othertimes they invoke modern values, thus manipulating the past and the present as a strategy of persuasion in difficult situations (cf. *ibid.*). Read, for instance, one of his many teachings which he repeatedly gives to his driver Kitwana:

¹¹ *Juba* is a kind of coat, open in front, with collar and wide sleeves of cloth of calico and linen.

¹² All his cynicism is contained in a sentence of his speech in which opens the party organized to celebrate his near-victory of the elections after the murder of Mvita: "*Tunakunywa kwa siha ya wanaoishi na huzuni za waliotuitoka.*" (KKN: 250)

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“[...] usiwe mjinga kama hawa vijana wanaopiga kelele dhidi ya watu walio-waokoa. Wale waliopigania kuliokoa taifa hili wana haki kulindwa na kuheshi-miwa na taifa hili . . .” (KKN: 114)

“[...] don’t be stupid like these youngsters that inveigh against who freed them. Those who combated to liberate this nation have the right to be defended and re-spected by the nation . . .”

“[...] non essere stupido come questi giovani che inveiscono contro quelli che li liberarono. Coloro che combatterono per liberare questa nazione, hanno il diritto di essere difesi e rispettati dalla nazione . . .” (*Il buio nella luce*: 82)

He owns a foreign trade company and collaborates with big Western nations on the black market, and then takes a sack of “foreign money” (*mijipesa chungu nzima ya kigeni*; KKN: 24) and deposits it abroad. Power and wealth are his goals in life. As a consequence of being a workaholic, he abandons Kudura just because she is no longer adequate to his social stature by preferring Bi Khaltiyy – a fashionable woman whom he marries so as to elevate his public position.

At the same time, Bwan Juba is a *shehe*¹³, the *imām* of Maweni (his native village) – a pious man. Towards his first wife, Kudura, he is arrogant and evil; towards Bi Khaltiyy, however, he is certainly more human: he never feels badly when he sees her eyes full of tears, particularly when he is the cause of her dissatisfaction or unhappiness. Thinking of Bi Khaltiyy his thoughts are sweetened and the author shows the tender side of Bwan Juba through the use of figurative and romantic language:

Bwan Juba aliutazama mwezi ule uliokuwa umemwaga mbalamwezi changa, akamkumbuka mkewe Bi Khaltiyy. Alitamani gari igeuke ndege iruke. Ingekuwa pepo kumpata Khaltiyy katika mbalamwezi hii akakaa naye kwenye veranda huku mbalamwezi inawatapakazia rangi yake ya fedha na huku yeye Bwan Juba anaitapakaa bahari ya maumbile na kukoga mapenzi ya Khaltiyy. (KKN: 161f.)

Bwan Juba observed the moon as it lavished a new glow and thought of his wife Bi Khaltiyy. He wished that his car would change into a bird to fly with. He imagined being with Khaltiyy on the balcony in the moonlight that poured its silver colour upon them, and he dived into this sea and swam into Khaltiyy’s love.

Bwan Juba osservava la luna che si riversava in un chiarore nuovo e pensò alla moglie Bi Khaltiyy. Desiderava che l’auto si trasformasse in un uccello per volare. Immaginò di essere con Khaltiyy sulla veranda al chiaro di luna che riversava su di loro il suo colore argento e Bwan Juba si immergeva in questo mare e nuotava nell’amore di Khaltiyy. (*Il buio nella luce*: 114)

At the cost of winning in business, Bwan Juba loses in love. This is a powerful contrast which the author draws of Bwan Juba’s figure. –

Mvita, with his deep black eyes and thin body, is the key character of this novel and the hero who sacrifices himself for his people and his ideal of justice. He is seized by a strong desire for justice and has a strong will to establish it. This is the reason why he organizes secret meetings that are supported by his fiancée Salma and other friends. His first ambition is

¹³ *Shehe* means ‘head, teacher, learned man’, or ‘important/ influential person’. Here *shehe* is the prayer leader of a mosque.

to discredit his father's image, so as to cause him to lose the elections. Being altruistic, the primary subject of his speeches are the people: he becomes the people's spokesman, especially for the most indignant who, like him, need justice and a world able to satisfy everybody. His conception of life defines him as the total opposite (the alter ego) of Bwan Juba. For Mvita, Man is on a journey, for whom life is only a passage on this earth. Unlike his father, he is not attached to the material world. Thus is written:

"Hana haja ya kutapia chochote. Hana haja ya kutaka makuu. Mwisho wake ni nafasi ndogo. Wale wanaojishughulisha na anasa za kilimwengu ndio walio shidani na yule anayeupuka ulimwengu na matamano yake ndiye aliyeokoka. Mwanadamu anahitaji kufanya kazi na kuishi maisha sahili hadi afe huku aki-ongozwa na wenye nguvu." (KKN: 8)

"There is no reason to desire anything. There is no reason to desire grand things. (Man's) end is immediate. He who devotes himself to earthly pleasures finds difficulty and he who avoids the world and its passions is he who is saved. Man has the need to work and live a simple life until he dies guided by the mighty."

"Non c'è motivo di desiderare alcunchè. Non c'è motivo di desiderare grandi cose. La sua fine è in un attimo. Proprio coloro che si dedicano ai piaceri terreni sono in difficoltà e chi evita il mondo e le sue passioni, colui che si salva. L'uomo ha bisogno di lavorare e vivere una vita facile finché muoia mentre è guidato dai potenti." (Il buio nella luce: 6)

With courage he abandons a pompous life by choosing one of his customary privations: he spends his days as a docker and cultivates cassava in the countryside. His usual life is only a bustle between town and the countryside. But Mvita does not lose hope. He is motivated by his personal pride. Being a determined man he knows that getting ahead is difficult and going back is virtually impossible. And through all this he knows that the earth will provide for him and support him, so he learns to pull the furrows and hollow out holes for sowing, to bury cassava seeds and sweet potatoes, and dig ditches in banana fields.

Mvita is an intellectual man, and the only member of the family who has studied.¹⁴ He can use his intellect to argue persuasively. One example is his astute explanation of *uhuni*¹⁵ when he even calls upon Hitler:

"Uhuni hufasirika namna nyingi. Fujo na uhaini pia. Wakati ule Hitler alipokuwa anataka kuuteka ulimwengu kwa mikono yake iliyojaa damu ili kusimamisha kiwiliwili cha beberu wa Ujerumani juu ya vichwa vya maiti vilivyofyekwa kutoka miili yao, aliwaita Wajerumani wenzake waliompinga wahuni na mahaini" (KKN: 9)

"Criminality can be interpreted in many ways. Disorder is pure treachery. When Hitler wanted to pillage the world with hands full of blood for the purpose of putting the bodies of the imperialistic Germans upon the heads of the decapitated bodies, he called the Germans, his fellow countrymen that opposed him, delinquents and criminals."

"La delinquenza si traduce in molti modi. Il disordine e il tradimento pure. Quando Hitler volle saccheggiare il mondo con le sue mani piene di sangue per

¹⁴ For this reason, besides the fact that Mvita is his son, Bwan Juba had invested in him all his hopes.

¹⁵ *Uhuni* means vagabondage, lawlessness, condition of having no fixed abode.

mettere il corpo dell'imperialista tedesco sulle teste dei cadaveri decapitati, chiamò i Tedeschi suoi connazionali che si opposero a lui, delinquenti e criminali” (Il buio nella luce: 7)

He himself is defined by those like Bwan Juba as *mhuni* (delinquent), that is to say: [...] *mmoja kati ya wale wahuni walioshindwa na mji na sasa anataka kuleta uhuni hapa Maweni* ([...] one of the delinquents who have failed in town and now want to bring delinquency here to Maweni; KKN: 185). This is due to his scandalous attempt to intervene during the sermon of the *imām*, his father Bwan Juba, in which he asks a question. However, it is not allowed to ask the *imām* a question, because he repeats God's words which are unquestionable. Bwan Juba tries to capture the believers' attention and their votes for the next elections.

Ceaselessly Mvita's thoughts and speeches ring as a warning for all those who continue to believe that they are nothing more than poor wretches and that they, for their miserable status, deserve to be inferiors who are ruled by those who legitimate their superiority by having the right and duty to get the ones who have no history, no culture, no civilization, no status, no character, out of roughness. Mvita tells his father what he thinks about the books which abound in Bwan Juba's office:

“Vitabu huwatia wengi wazimu na mifano ipo kadha ulimwengu [...] soma nadharia ya kuhalalisha ubwana wa jamii moja juu ya nyingine kutawaliwa na haki ya kuwatoa ushenzini watu wasio na historia, wasio na utamaduni, wasio na ustaarabu, wasio na hulka, tabia, silka [...]” (KKN: 20)

“Books drive many people mad and the world is full of these examples [...] read those theories that legitimate the dominion of a group over the others, by ruling having the right to get who have no history, no culture, no civilization, no status, no mood, no character out of roughness [...]”

“I libri fanno impazzire molti e di esempi al mondo ce ne sono tanti [...] leggi le teorie legittimanti la signoria di una famiglia sulle altre, governate con il diritto di sottrarre alla rozzezza coloro che non hanno storia, non hanno cultura, non hanno civiltà, uno status, una disposizione, un carattere [...]” (Il buio nella luce: 14f.)

In my reading this passage can be interpreted as a reference which Mvita makes to Darwin's evolutionist theory which was used by that time to justify colonial rule.

Another character of primary importance in the novel is Kudura, Bwan Juba's first wife. Her presence is constant throughout the novel. She projects an image of a frustrated and maltreated woman who must satisfy her husband, may never doubt him and has to accept all his vexations for the sake of marriage. Often the thought crosses her mind to disobey her husband. Her 'second soul' instigates her against him, it tries to incite her not to submit, to say no, to contest, though in the end she is worried that these thoughts will drive her to hell, as she is God-fearing. She then tries to make these *mawazo maovu* (bad thoughts; KKN: 47) disappear by using the verses of one of the most popular Swahili poems, the *Utenzi wa Mwana Kupona*.¹⁶ Kudura remains in this state of inner tension until, already abandoned by her husband,

¹⁶ Written in 1858 by Mwana Kupona, it is the most well-known didactic poem. In the novel Kudura recites the strophes number 27 and 30:

she becomes an accomplice along with Mbishi of Bwan Juba's murder, which is realized for the purpose of avenging Mvita's death.¹⁷ Together, they decide to take justice into their own hands, since in Mvita's opinion, "justice is a beast yet to be conceived" (*Ah, maskini haki, nyama hili bado halijazaliwa*; KKN: 10).

Kudura is the character that undergoes an important evolution through the course of events. She is the one who will bring a definitive end to the megalomania and public image of Bwan Juba who, until yesterday, was *Mungu wake wa pili* (her second God; KKN: 46); see, for this, the episode of the poker (cf. KKN: 134) in which Kudura finally frees her second soul. She is a new woman, she is now reborn as she openly shows her discontent and grudges towards Bwan Juba:

"Wewe una fadhila gani wewe? [...] Wewe una la kusema wewe? Ukifikiri tulikotoka, ukiwaza ulivyokuwa? Nilikwenda nawe kiutu, nikakusubiria kwa mvua na jua. Wakati ule sikuwa mjinga, wakati ule sikuwa mpumbavu, siku zile sikuwa mchafu. Siye wewe uliyekuwa ukikwangura vyungu na kuburura masafuria? Siye wewe uliyekuwa ukilalia mchago katika hiki hiki kifuu cha nyumba unachokilaani leo? Unasema nini wewe unayestahili kusemwa? Umekulia jasho langu na nguvu zangu. Umenifyonza na kuninyang'anya damu yangu. Leo umekuwa bwana mkubwa siyo, huwezi kufyonza ndonya yako mwenyewe? [...] Yameondoka mapenzi, hata na hisani? [...] Mnajitononoa wenyewe tu, walio nyuma yenu a-a! Mwaka wa ngapi huu mimi sijui chakula chako wala nguo yako. Na mimi iwe potelea mbali, hawa watoto wako je? [...] Watoto wangu wakubwa umewafisidi na kuwafukuza [...] Hujui halali wala haramu wewe unapapia tu!" (KKN: 134f.)

"You, what gratitude have you? [...] You, what have you to say? If you think about where we came from, if you reflect, like how you were. I've been with you humanly, I've waited for you with the rain and sun. In that era I was not stupid, I was not foolish, I was not dirty. Was it not you that scraped the pots and carried the crocks? Was it not you who slept in this hole of a house that today you damn? What is it that you say that's worth saying? You devoured my strength. You sucked and stole my blood. Now that you've become a grand gentleman can't you suck your own? [...] Love has faded away and so has also kindness? You fatten up alone, who is behind you – a – a! How many years have passed by that you haven't given me food to eat and clothes to wear? Leave me be, but what about your children? [...] You have ruined my grown-up sons and have thrown them out [...] You know neither righteousness nor unlawfulness, you only devour!"

Keti naye kwa adabu

*Usimtie ghadhabu
Akinena simjibu
Itahidi kunyamaa
Kilala siikukuse
Mwegeme umpapase
Na upepo asikose
Mtu wa kumpepea
(cited in: KKN: 47f.)*

Be polite with him
Don't arouse his anger
If he speaks, don't answer
Try to be quiet
If he is laying, don't stand off
Caress him
And he must not miss air
Fan him

*Sii accanto a lui educata
Non dargli ragion di collera
Se parla non dar risposta
Ma zitta cerca di startene
Se è steso non ti scanzare
Vallo ad accarezzare
e aria non gli deve mancare
che sei tu che devi fargliene
(cf. Bertoncini-Zúbková 1999)*

Mwana Kupona's words put her in a good mood thus feeling so completely reinvigorated, she becomes once again able to serve her husband.

¹⁷ They are helped by Kitwana, Bwan Juba's driver, Baker, who is one of the waiters at the party that Bwan Juba gives to celebrate the near-victory of the elections, and one of the boys who sold contraband goods for him.

“Tu, che gratitudine hai tu? [...] Tu cosa hai da dire, tu? Se pensi da dove siamo venuti, se rifletti, com’eri? Sono stata con te umanamente, ti ho aspettato con la pioggia e con il sole. A quel tempo non ero stupida, a quel tempo non ero tonta, in quei giorni non ero sporca. Non eri tu che grattavi le pignatte e trascinavi le pentole? Non eri tu a dormire sul letto in questo buco di casa che oggi maledici? Cosa dici tu che meriti di essere detto? Hai mangiato il mio sudore e le mie forze. Mi hai succhiato e rubato il sangue. Oggi sei diventato un gran signore, vero, non puoi succhiare te stesso? [...] L’amore è svanito, quindi anche la gentilezza? [...] Vi ingrassate soltanto voi, chi è dietro di voi a –a! Da quanti anni non mi dai da mangiare né da vestire. E lascia perdere me, ma questi tuoi figli allora? [...] Hai rovinato i miei figli grandi e li hai cacciati [...] Non conosci il lecito né l’illecito, tu divorzi solo!” (Il buio nella luce: 96)

The tragedy is that Kudura after having freed her soul inside, becomes a prisoner outside. She will eventually die through suicide in jail, where she is locked up for the murder of Bwan Juba. –

Finally there is Salma, the beautiful fiancée and then secondwife of Mvita. Trustful of the future, she is the character who concludes the novel, happy to find out, by means of a letter, that many friends are waiting for her to come out of the prison, where she unjustly ends up with the charge of having killed Mvita – the person whom she loved most in the world.

If all has begun with a quarrel between Mvita and Bwan Juba, which constitutes the incipient cause in the story, the epilogue is the conclusive affirmation of solidarity, friendship and hope for improvement. The radical change which the just people are waiting for must be entrusted onto the hands of the new generation which is symbolized by the unborn child – fruit of the strong and sincere love of two young people, Mvita and Salma. This child who will see the ‘light’, is the symbol of hope. The author remarks:

Mapenzi ni asili ya mwanadamu na utamu wake pia. [...] Mapenzi ambayo kama yangalikuwepo yangalitengeneza kila kitu duniani. (KKN: 5)¹⁸

Love is the essence for human beings and also for his sweetness. [...] Love, that, if there was any, would put in order everything in the world.

L’amore è l’essenza dell’essere umano ed anche della sua dolcezza. [...] L’amore che, se ci fosse, sistemerebbe ogni cosa al mondo. (Il buio nella luce: 4)

¹⁸ This is the author’s thought when he reflects upon the attitudes of Salma who is immersed in her typewriter while Mvita gazes at her beauty with all his love (Salma and Mvita have not declared their love yet). The author compares the world of love to the mechanical world:

Ulimwengu wa mashini ni tafauti na ulimwengu wa mapenzi. Mashini upujufu na uchapwa wa mwisho wa mwanadamu. Mapenzi ni asili ya mwanadamu na utamu wake pia. Mashini zimegeuza kila duniani na kuvifanya duni. Zimepoteza hata mapenzi ya kweli. Mapenzi ambayo kama yangalikuwepo yangalitengeneza kila kitu duniani. (KKN: 5)

The universe of machines is different from the universe of love. Machines are a result of the unbiassedness and boredom of man. Love is the essence for human beings and also for his sweetness. Machines change everything and render misery, destroying even true love. Love, that, if there was any, would put in order everything in the world.

L’universo delle macchine è diverso dall’universo dell’amore. La macchina è frutto della spregiudicatezza e della noia dell’uomo. L’amore è l’essenza dell’essere umano ed anche della sua dolcezza. Le macchine trasformano ogni cosa e la rendono misera. Distruggono persino il vero amore. L’amore che, se ci fosse, sistemerebbe ogni cosa al mondo. (Il buio nella luce: 4)

One can clearly see that the characters facing each other are emblematic, both the protagonists as well as the minor characters.

3. Linguistic Features

The authoritative portrait of an everyday reality is created due to the calculated combination of every word and of sentence of the author, which all seem to reproduce sounds and sights that enable the reader to 'hear' as well as 'see' the events within the story. Each part of the speech within the text leads to a style which consists of a variety of registers (formal, refined, colloquial and slang). Said Ahmed Mohamed skilfully manages different registers of dialogues. The recording of spoken language contains the English-Swahili codeswitching typical for young people, for example: "*Na watu kama nyinyi bob manake nd'o one time; yeeees, one time!*" (KKN: 140); "*Mali 'ii bob, fresh manake.*" (KKN: 142), and the varieties of Swahili often spoken by Indians and of Arabic, as in the case of Ahuru, the coffee hawker, an Arab of Hadramaut who argues with Kudura:

"Haya, leta besa yangu ya jumaa zima . . ." [...] "Sinatua kwa hakki yangu . . ." [...] "Sabahlkheri, walakin sabah naanze vizuri kwetu sute: sabah l'kheir wa kulu l'kheir . . ." [...] "Sinashaga ila nataka hakki yangu . . . kila siku zam zam una linda banki au la wewe askkar? Nanyang'anywa bwana, wewe nabaki zam zam . . ." [...] "Nakuja natafuta nakopwa, sinakuja nauza gahwa." [...] Taliba taliba: haya . . . mwaka wa hasra . . ." [...] "Fingapi tena?" [...] "Sinakunywa basss. Nataka gahwa brre na nazaa natoa juu, vipi manamke wewe?" [...] "Gahwa ya kukopa, sinakata kiu!" (KKN: 31)

"Dai, borta i miei zoldi dell'intera settimana . . ." [...] "Non mi fermo davanti a giò ghe mi sbetta . . ." [...] "Buongiorno, ma ghe inizi davvero bene questo giorno per nuoi tutti: buongiorno, e ogni bene . . ." [...] No imbortuno, voglio giò ghe mi sbetta . . ." [...] "ogni giorno il turno, il turno, fai la guardia alla banga o tu sei un soldato? Vengo derubato, bwana, e tu resdare con i turni . . ." [...] "Vengo ad essere scroccado, non vengo a vendere gaffè." [...] "Bagherai, bagherai: vergogna . . . anno di rabbia . . ." [...] "Quanto angora?" [...] "Allora non bere. Volere gaffè gratis e in biù le gritiche, che donna sei?" [...] "Il gaffè scroccado no sbegna la sete!" (Il buio nella luce: 22)¹⁹

In general, the language of the novel is Kiunguja, as demonstrated in the title '*Kiza katika Nuru*' – it is '*kiza*' rather than the Standard Swahili '*giza*'. Below are other differences in regard to the orthography and phonetics of the text:

The semivowel W is frequently inserted between two vowels if one of these is U or O: *bumbuwazi* < *bumbuazi*, *-uwa* < *-ua*, *-juwa* < *-jua*. On the contrary, W is omitted in some words, such as: *-eka* < *-weka*.

The semivowel Y is inserted between two vowels to avoid the hiatus, too: *hiyari* < *hiari*, *zoweya* < *-zoea*, and it is omitted where standard grammar calls for it: *akushindae* < *akushindaye*.

R and L are often interchangeable: *-roa/-lo(w)a*, *-regarega/-legalega*.

The loss of H in spoken language indicated by the apostrophe: '*usikii*', '*alishibi*,

¹⁹ No English translation available yet.

‘alipi, ‘ata (‘ta), ‘iyo, a’sante, ‘uyo (the standard Swahili is: *husikii, halishibi...*).

G becomes Y in the verb *-mwaya (-mwaga)*; by contrast, in some words J turns into G: *shemegi < shemeji, -regea < -rejea*. Elisions and contractions of vowels are also frequent: *hayeshi < hayaishi, halendi < haliendi, nayeche < nayaiche, n’tasema < nitasema, b’re < bure, heshi < haishi*.

Other words that differ from Standard Swahili are: *yepi* rather than *yupi*, *-engine* < *-ingine*, *tabu* < *taabu*.

There are also several examples for morphological differences, such as: the relative verbal marker TA rather than TAKA, the negative future marker TO combined with the other negative marker HA, the morpheme O which usually replaces the relative particles, so that the previous vowel is lost: *kiso < kisicho, iso < isiyo, n’tomuweka < nitakayemuweka, n’sokuwa < nisiyekuwa*. An unusual relative form (inflexion) is *chambacho* (‘what he said’; KKN: 98; ‘as people say’; KKN: 146).

Kiunguja differs from Standard Swahili in its phonetics, orthography, grammar and, above all, a vocabulary which is far richer and diverse. Said Ahmed Mohamed pays a lot of attention to sophisticated syntactic constructions and, above all, to the research of vocabulary. This is full of synonyms, idiomatic expressions, Swahili sayings, proverbs,²⁰ and English borrowings. It requires a glossary and the help of the author himself.²¹

Some of the many expressions and words which were impossible for me to translate without the author’s explanation are listed below:

kumwacha kombo (KKN: 12): kushindwa naye, kutomuweza, kutoweza kumshinda. Not to succeed in something/to be unable to do something/to fail in doing. *Italian: Non riuscirci (con lui)*.

mawazo wambi (KKN: 13): mawazo mabaya. Bad thoughts. *Cattivi pensieri*.

kalamu imelalia yombo (KKN: 14): kalamu imelala upande, kalamu haikusimama wima. The nib inclined and twisted on one side. *Il pennino giaceva storto su un lato*.

furja (KKN: 18): furaha ya pumbao na uharibifu wa vitu na mali; furaha ya kupindukia mpaka.(as explained in the glossary of the novel itself). Waste. *Sperpero*.

kutia pofu jicho la pili (KKN: 30): kuongeza matatizo zaidi ya yale aliyonayo mtu. To increase problems (Literally: ‘to blind the second eye’). *Accrescere i problemi*.

shada imeingia mada haitamkiki (KKN: 45): tata imeingia tata, tatizo limezidi kutatizika, halitatuliki; [*mada*: alama inayotumika katika hati ya Kiarabu kwa kutilia mkazo tamko fulani; mkazo wa kuvuta; jambo la kuzungumziwa (as explained in the glossary of the novel itself)]. Problems upon problems without so-

²⁰ Said Ahmed Mohamed manipulates the Swahili sayings and proverbs. The sayings and proverbs do not only appear in speeches and thoughts of the characters, but also in the narrative voice. They appear in their integral form or in a modified form due to stylistic demands. Proverbs, sayings and aphorisms soak the novel in traditional popular wisdom, and mark its rhythm by pronouncing exhortations, threats, admonitions and all that is linked to them.

²¹ Said Ahmed Mohamed has generously explained many terms and expression of the text to me in 2004, by sending e-mails to Professor Bertocini who was our intermediary.

lution. Problemi su problemi irrisolvibili.

-*bebedua* (KKN: 67): kumtomjali mtu, -ona duni; -dharau kupita kiasi. To despise. *Disprezzare*.

ukakatima (KKN: 81): ukatili. Cruelty. *Crudeltà*.

kila mmoja kwa ubawa wake (KKN: 96): kila mmoja kwa uwezo wake. Everyone with his own power. *Ognuno con il proprio potere*.

sambejambe (KKN: 105): ovyo. Muddled (confused). *Confuso*.

ubogoyo (KKN: 107): hali ya kutokuwa na meno (hasa kwa watu wakongwe). Toothless. *Senza denti*.

utata (KKN: 107): uzito wa kuweza kusema. Stammer. *Balbuzie*.

mkarambuko (KKN: 128): hali ya kukazana kimwili. Physical strength. *Forza fisica*.

(kutokuwa na) *faka* (KKN: 137): nafasi. (Don't have) time. *(Non avere) tempo*.

(shughuli za) *mag'hamu* (KKN: 141): wizi kwa kutumia njia ya udanganyifu (slang). Black market/illicit trade. *Intrallazzi*.

kumzika mtu (KKN: 142): kumwibia mtu kwa ujanja na kumkimbia (slang). To rob somebody by fraud and then slip away. *Rubare qualcuno con l'inganno e svignarsela*.

babbiiyy (KKN: 142): baby/mwanamke mrembo (slang). An elegant/well dressed girl. *Una ragazza elegante/ben vestita*.

(*kaptura*) *mbwangambwanga* (KKN: 148): inayopwaya. Loose shorts. *Pantaloni corti troppo larghi*.

These and many others expressions and terms are difficult at least for a cultural and/or linguistic outsider; whereas for Zanzibarian readers they might not be difficult at all.

4. Aspects of Translation

In this section, I would like to explain some aspects of translating *Kiza katika Nuru* into the Italian version *Il buio nella luce*. I have carried out this translation as part of my M.A. Thesis (Nocera 2004).

In current literary studies the translated text has gained more attention. But it is also important to keep the concept of loyalty towards the original text. My translation of *Kiza katika Nuru* aspires to be a literal translation using notes both for terms and expressions left in their original language and for many idiomatic expressions, proverbs, and fine plays on words, that make sense only in Swahili or that represent colloquial expressions that have no meaning in the Italian language. Consider, for instance, an expression of figurative language like '*kuji-funga kibwebwe*' (*nikajifunga kibwebwe*; KKN: 82). If one translates it literally – 'to knot *kibwebwe*' – it would completely lose its figurative meaning which in Swahili is 'to prepare oneself to do something well'.

A solution for translating the horizontal rhymes was not easily found; for example, the horizontal rhyme and play on words between *choo* (latrine) and *chuo* (school; *chuo kikuu*: university):

“*Toka arudi huko chooni, ee, chuoni sijui chuo kikuu [...]” (KKN: 65)*

“Since he came back from the loo, ee, from school, I mean university [...]”

“*Da quando è tornato dalla scolo, ee, scola, cioè l’università [...]” (Il buio nella luce: 46)²²*

Unfortunately the expressiveness, musicality and rhythm produced in the original text could not always be maintained in the translation. This is, for instance, the case with the coloured expression which describes Shehe Kumba’s breath in a particular moment of irritation:

Alijibu kwa mkupuo wa pumzi zilizompita nje na ndani mbiombio. (KKN: 102)

He answered with a laboured breath.

Rispose con il respiro affannoso. (Il buio nella luce: 74)

The expression signifies a ‘laboured breath’ as I translated. But I am aware that the translated text has not only lost precision, but also expressiveness. Actually, *mkupuo* is ‘shake’, ‘push’; *pumzi* is ‘breath’, ‘respiration’, therefore: *alijibu kwa mkupuo wa pumzi zilizompita nje na ndani mbiombio* (KKN: 102), it would be “he answered with the push of breaths that were passing outside and inside of him in a rush”, or something like this.

The first obstacle encountered was the syntax: the sentence construction, the verbal tenses, the punctuation (i.e. the frequent usage of ‘. . .’) have been adapted in the translating language for the intelligibility and fluency of the text. But if the strategy chosen for translating the syntax is generally more homogeneous from beginning to end, then by contrast the lexical level poses an uninterrupted series of problems, because its solutions are more numerous than those proposed on the syntactic level. From this point, not only was there an effort to understand a problem, but also, a difficulty in the usage of the acquired knowledge of the translated language continuously for the best and most adequate possible reformulation.

Not the least of which, were the problems concerning the language: imitating the slang, linguistic register, the reproduction of Codeswitching (English – Swahili) and dialecticisms, for example in the reproduction of Kipemba²³ (KKN: 51; 240):

“*kwani ‘sa ntoto weye, wafanya kisirani? Nakwansha mara saba, hutaki kuanka kwenda sukuli . . . ntoto weye afiriti ‘sa! Kila siku ukianka kisirani. Utan’ua fo!’* (KKN: 51)

From the above passage you are able to notice the following differences between Kipemba and Standard Swahili:

M becomes N before consonants (except B, P, V, F): *ntoto* (*mtoto*; child); *-ansha* (*-amsha*; wake sb. up); *-anka* (*-amka*; wake up); *Weye* (*wewe*; you).

The verbal marker A is the only one that is used for the positive present tense: *wafanya*, *nakwansha*.

Sukuli: *skuli* (school).

²² The Italian term *scolo* means ‘water drainage’; *scola* is an Italian jargon version for *scuola* (school).

²³ It is the rural dialect of Pemba, an island to the north of Zanzibar; together they constitute the country of Zanzibar.

Afiriti: afiriti (rascal).

Utan'ua: utaniua (you'll kill me).

Fo: fofofo (just so).

I tried to translate it into Italian this way (there is no English translation available yet):

“Perché ora tu, pampino (rather than bambino), mi fai arrappiare (arrabbiare)? Ti sfeglio (svegli) sette folte (volte), non fuoi (yuoi) sfegliarti (svegliarti) per andare a sucuola (scuola) . . . canaglia di pampino! Ogni giorno che ti sfegli (svegli), sono proplemi (problemi). Mi ucciderai proprio!” (Il buio nella luce: 36)

However, I have always tried to make the word clear, the expression or the whole sequence in Italian, using notes to recall the original version.

Even if this translation from Swahili to Italian cannot replace the original text for an accurate knowledge of it, it is intended to become a lively stimulus to approach the original text and the culture that flows out from it.

5. Conclusion

Kiza katika Nuru can be classified as a sociological novel. Thus it introduces a range of characters, a variety of names and faces, all caught up in the grip of a world that is fair for a few and crooked for the many.

The novel contains impressionistic pages in which the reader is confronted with vivid and intense brushstrokes, short or wide, and of various dimensions of reality (inside – outside, inward – outward reality), in which the author develops authentic paintings in motion, which not only reproduce images, but also sounds.

The structure of the novel achieves an organic cohesion through the skilful assembly of the plot. This harmony is derived from a calculated movement in the plot in which the vicissitudes of the main protagonists of the story, Mvita and Bwan Juba, are alternated with those of other characters. *Kiza katika Nuru* finds a rhythm, made more vivid in such a way due to a series of symmetries and internal relationships, that not only make it more interesting to read, but also give it a deeper sense, becoming a metaphor of human life.

The impression I have obtained from reading it is that of a dynamic moving picture of a ‘true’ story, which through the fusion of concrete elements and symbolic allusions, represents a complex reality – a reading of life which is full of drama, engagement, toil, but, above all, value.

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